

Renton's Annexation to the King County Library System

Overview

Renton residents care about their library services and use them regularly. Providing quality, financially sustainable library services to residents is a City of Renton priority. Renton's population has grown and diversified since the 1960s when the Main branch opened Downtown. The role of libraries also has changed, from simply offering books, to supplementing public education, supporting career development, providing access to technology, and connecting members of the community.

The City of Renton cannot afford to continue the quality of library services and programs that its diverse residents want and need without additional funding.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the current situation regarding Renton library services and what services are available now to Renton residents?

Currently, the City of Renton funds two Renton Public Libraries: the main location in downtown Renton, and the branch in the Renton Highlands. Services are provided by a staff of 38 and the 2009 budget was \$1.8 million.

The Renton Public Library provides:

- A collection of 190,000 books, magazines, DVDs, CDs, videos, audiobooks
- Programs for all ages, including story times for pre-scholars and infants, programs for teens, adult book club, "Talk Time" for English language learners.
- Summer reading programs for children and adults.
- Nine public computers at the Highlands Branch, 11 at the Main Library, providing Internet access and popular software applications.
- Delivery of library materials and programs to homebound patrons, adult assisted living facilities, schools, and day care facilities.
- Sixty hours of service per week at the Main Library, and 42 hours of service per week at the Highlands branch.
- For details, see <http://library.rentonwa.gov>

Why are Renton voters being asked to consider changing administration of library services?

There is a recognized need for library improvements in Renton. Comparison data shows large gaps between Renton's existing library service levels and those of similar libraries in Washington and around the nation.

A 2006 Master Planning process found that "Renton lags far behind in the resources available to provide responsive, high-quality library services needed by its growing and diverse citizenry." The planning process identified the actions needed to sustain and modernize the library system, recommending an investment of \$27 million to cover the estimated the cost of critical building upgrades, service improvements, collection recommendations and program needs.

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Strategic investments are necessary in order to maintain and improve library services in the future. The current funding model coupled with the City's current financial situation prevents the City from making investments in desired upgrades and enhancements to library services and facilities. Doing nothing to change the funding model will result in future library service cuts that could range from reduced branch and staff hours to closing facilities.

What are Renton voters being asked to do about future library services?

Renton voters will be asked on the February 9, 2010, ballot whether to annex to the King County Library System (KCLS). This document provides additional details.

Annexation would mean that City of Renton residents would pay for library services through property taxes levied by KCLS, rather than the current funding from a combination of city property taxes and a fee paid by the City to KCLS.

If approved, annexation would take effect in January 2011, but KCLS would take over operations of the Renton libraries in March 2010 via contract between the City and KCLS. The Renton City Council and Renton Library Board both endorsed giving Renton voters the chance to decide for themselves whether to join KCLS. If annexation is rejected, Renton libraries would remain a function of the City of Renton. The City of Renton wants to make sure residents have the information necessary to make informed decisions about future library services.

What is the King County Library System (KCLS)?

KCLS is a separate local government with the sole purpose of providing library services to area residents. KCLS is not a part of King County government. Key facts about KCLS include:

- It is the third-busiest public library system in the United States
- The KCLS collection includes more than four million items (on average, KCLS adds 375,000 new items to its collection each year)
- Services are provided by approximately 1,200 KCLS employees
- The annual KCLS operating budget is more than \$90 million
- KCLS serves a wide range of communities through 44 community libraries throughout King County, including the Fairwood Library in Renton. KCLS cardholders have full use of Seattle Public Libraries, and other neighboring library districts through a reciprocal borrowing agreement: <http://www.kcls.org/usingthelibrary/librarycards/index.cfm> .
- For KCLS hours and locations please go to <http://www.kcls.org/locations/index.cfm/>.

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What would annexation to KCLS mean for me?

Changes that would happen if Renton voters approve annexation to KCLS include:

- **Building Improvements.** Current Renton libraries would be improved with new lighting, furniture, technology and signage. Eventually Renton and KCLS would develop and construct replacement facilities for both the Main library downtown and the Highlands branch, to be funded by Renton residents.
- **20 More Library Hours per Week.** The Main library would add three open hours per week, and the Highlands branch would add 17 additional hours, including hours on Friday.
- **Improved Technology.** Upgraded workstations, desktop printing, and laptops for checkout to use in the library.
- **Library Collection.** Enhanced materials in print and non-print, as well as access to the full KCLS collection and online resources, an extensive downloadable collection of ebooks, audio books, videos and music (including iPod compatible content).
- **Outreach Services.** Schools, daycare sites, community centers, senior facilities and homebound patrons would be served by the KCLS Traveling Library, ABC Express mobile vans, and Techlab mobile computer lab.
- **Governance.** Renton residents would be eligible for appointment to the KCLS Board of Trustees, the governing body for KCLS.

Would materials or services change under KCLS?

The quantity and variety of materials and services would increase substantially under KCLS. In addition to the items listed above, the following would be provided:

- Numerous services and resources aimed at helping students achieve success in school, including "Live Homework Help," an online service that offers one-on-one assistance available daily; "Study Zones" that offer in-person tutoring; and SAT preparation classes available in libraries and online.
- "This Just In" email alert system that notifies patrons of new items in the collection.
- 100 items may be checked out at one time (the current Renton library limit is 50) and 25 holds are permitted at one time (Renton currently allows 15).
- Public meeting space and quiet study rooms are an important element in all KCLS libraries. New replacement facilities would likely include these amenities.
- Reading incentive programs for preschoolers through teens: Summer Reading Program for preschoolers through age 12; "Read 3, Get One Free" for middle and high school age students; and "Ready, Set, Read" for youngsters and families.

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Would Renton Library staff lose their jobs?

All Renton staff (full and part-time), at all levels of seniority, will have the option to become employees of KCLS. All Renton substitute staff will be able to join KCLS substitute pools at the appropriate level.

Would Renton Library facilities close?

The Renton Library facilities are currently owned and operated by the City of Renton. If annexation is approved, KCLS would begin operating the existing Renton library facilities in March 2010. However, ownership of the facilities would not change. In the future (2011 or later), the City of Renton and KCLS would develop and construct replacement facilities for both branches in locations to be acquired by the City. The City would be responsible for the cost of development and construction of both branches. Ownership of new library properties and buildings would be transferred to KCLS after construction.

Would library hours change?

Overall library hours would be expanded. The Main library would be open an additional three hours per week and the Highlands branch would be open an additional 17 hours per week, including hours on Friday.

	CURRENT HOURS	PROPOSED HOURS (AFTER ANNEXATION)
MAIN BRANCH		
Monday-Thursday	10 a.m. – 9 p.m.	10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Friday	10 a.m. – 6 p.m.	10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Saturday	10 a.m. – 6 p.m.	10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Sunday	Closed	1 p.m. – 5 p.m.
HIGHLANDS BRANCH		
Monday-Thursday	10 a.m. – 7 p.m.	10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Friday	Closed	10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Saturday	10 a.m. – 4 p.m.	10 am. – 5 p.m.
Sunday	Closed	Closed

What would happen to the current Renton collection?

The current Renton collection would be incorporated into the KCLS collection and would remain in Renton libraries. Each item in KCLS has a “home” where it resides when it is not on hold somewhere else in the system. The Renton collection would not be assigned to other libraries, but it would be available for borrowing throughout the system, just as collection items from any KCLS location are available to borrowers throughout the system.

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Would it take longer to get a book?

The existing Renton materials will still be based in Renton libraries, and items available at other libraries will be shipped to the branch a patron requests. The average amount of time to get a book from another KCLS library is approximately 72 hours, but high demand materials may have longer wait times. KCLS has an extensive eBook, audio and downloadable collection offering immediate access at the two Renton branches.

Would independence and local control be lost by joining KCLS?

While the City of Renton would not determine which library materials and services would be provided through KCLS libraries in Renton, the City would continue to appoint a local Library Board to advise on issues related to Renton, and to serve as a link between Renton citizens, the City and KCLS. KCLS encourages its staff to be aware of and responsive to community needs and desires. With annexation, Renton residents would be eligible for appointment to the KCLS Board of Trustees, and encouraged to join any of the Friends of the Library groups that provide guidance and support to KCLS.

Would KCLS be accountable for services and costs, with actions transparent to the public?

As all government entities do, KCLS makes their decisions available to the public as required by State law. The KCLS Board of Trustees emphasizes transparency of the organization. Information about services and costs are currently and would continue to be available on the KCLS website, at Board meetings, and via public information requests.

All Board meetings (including Committee meetings) are open to the public and are announced and held in accordance with the Washington's Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30). Schedules for every KCLS Board activity and action are available to the public online at <http://www.kcls.org/about/board/>.

The KCLS Board conducts public forums quarterly, and members of the public are invited to share their library-related comments and concerns. In addition, each year, public budget hearings are held so the public can comment on budget priorities. KCLS Board and staff also regularly attend Friends and Advisory meetings.

KCLS also has annual audits of its finances by the State of Washington. Findings are available to the public.

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What would be the cost of remaining an independent library system?

The costs to Renton taxpayers for library services from either system would likely be roughly the same. If Renton chose to stay in the library business, the current funding situation with the Renton library system would continue. Renton residents would continue to pay city property and other taxes to help pay to operate Renton libraries. If the reciprocal agreement with KCLS continued, Renton would also continue to pay KCLS that annual fee for residents to use KCLS libraries. Either way, an increase in taxes will be necessary to maintain library services, whether at the current level, or to improve services and facilities as recommended by the Library Master Plan Study.

Today, City of Renton residents pay property taxes, other taxes and fees, and charges that are deposited in the City's general operating budget. Library services are funded from that operating budget, along with all other city services. The current City of Renton library system costs \$1.8 million annually. For comparison purposes, if residents paid for library services only with property taxes, current library services cost roughly \$104 per year for a \$400,000 home.

Remaining independent and fully funding the improvements recommended in Renton's Library Master Plan, including rebuilding one library branch and making program and system improvements, would cost approximately \$260 per year for a \$400,000 home.

What would be the cost of joining KCLS?

The cost to taxpayers for getting library services from either system would likely be roughly the same.

Annexation to KCLS, including property taxes paid to the library system, and with Renton rebuilding two library branches, would cost a resident approximately \$236 per year for a \$400,000 home.

State law sets KCLS' maximum property tax levy for library services and operations at \$0.50 per \$1,000 of Assessed Valuation (AV). Initiative 747 also caps the annual levy rate increase to 1% each year. The current KCLS property tax levy rate for 2009 is \$0.36 per \$1,000 of AV and is expected to increase to \$0.42 in 2010 due to a 12% decrease in property tax values. KCLS will have a levy lid lift measure on the February 9, 2010, ballot that, if passed by voters, would increase its annual levy rate for one year in 2011. This will be voted on by voters throughout the system on February 9, 2010. If Renton residents pass annexation to KCLS, they would not be assessed the KCLS levy rate until 2011.

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An example of the comparative household costs (at known 2010 rates) is below.

	REMAIN INDEPENDENT		ANNEX TO KCLS	
	Renton Library System	Recently Annexed Areas	Renton Library System	Recently Annexed Areas
System costs (cents per \$1,000 AV)				
Current Renton Operations (equivalent property tax)	0.26	0.26		
City Library Master Plan Improvements	0.22	0.22		
Renton: New Library Building(s)	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17
KCLS Operations Levy*			0.42	0.42
KCLS 2004 Construction Levy		0.05		0.07
Total cost for library services per \$1,000 AV	0.65	0.70	0.59	0.66

Annual cost for a \$400,000 home: **\$260 \$280 \$236 \$264**

* The KCLS levy rate is expected to be \$0.42 in 2010 and could rise to \$0.50 in 2011, subject to voter approval.

Who makes the decision about whether Renton will join KCLS?

The library annexation issue will be on the February 9, 2010, ballot. A simple majority (50% plus one) of voters residing within the City of Renton will decide if Renton should join KCLS.

Can annexation to KCLS be undone?

Voters may reverse annexation by a special election (initiated by the Renton City Council) at least three years after the original measure was approved.

How do larger King County budget problems affect KCLS?

Because KCLS is not a part of King County government, KCLS is not affected by King County budget problems. KCLS is a separate jurisdiction under State law with the sole mission to provide library services to area residents.

What are the key dates?

- September 2009-February 2010: information online at www.rentonwa.gov and www.kcls.org
- January 22, 2010: Ballots mailed to Renton voters
- February 9, 2010: Special Election – voters asked to vote on annexation to King County Library System
- March, 2010: If annexation is approved, KCLS assumes operation of Renton libraries.

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How can I learn more about this issue?

1. Subscribe to the City of Renton library page for updates as they become available

Go to <http://rentonwa.gov/subscriptions.aspx?Dmode=0&id=9124> and activate an account, and check the box under “custom” focused on library services.

2. Contact the City of Renton if you have questions

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